

This is a continuation application of USSN 09/966,293 filed on September 28, 2001

Title of the Invention

A Keyboard that Incorporates a Printing Mechanism

Field of Invention

This invention relates to a keyboard. More particularly, the invention relates to a computer keyboard that incorporates a printing mechanism.

Background to the Invention

Printers for use with computers can be relatively expensive devices. Accordingly, in a work environment, it is common for a plurality of workstations to be serviced by a single printer station with the computers of those workstations communicating with the printer.

This necessitates people at the workstation having to get up and collect their documents from the printer which can be time wasting. Often, all that is required is a single sheet of paper, for example, where a letter is to be generated or where an image is to be viewed and a hard copy of the image is required.

Desktop inkjet printers are available at low cost, but typically take up substantial desk space. Incorporation of the printing function in a desktop computer keyboard frees up this desk space.

While it is technically possible to incorporate a scanning ink jet printer into a keyboard, this has several disadvantages, including excess bulk and side-to-side vibration as the printhead scans.

Recently, the present inventor has invented ink jet printer technologies suitable for incorporation in a desktop keyboard, such as:

6,227,652	6,213,588	6,213,589	6,231,163	6,247,795
6,394,581	6,244,691	6,257,704	6,416,168	6,220,694
6,257,705	6,247,794	6,234,610	6,247,793	6,264,306
6,241,342	6,247,792	6,264,307	6,254,220	6,234,611
6,302,528	6,283,582	6,239,821	6,338,547	6,247,796
6,557,977	6,390,603	6,362,843	6,293,653	6,312,107
6,227,653	6,234,609	6,238,040	6,188,415	6,227,654
6,209,989	6,247,791	09/112,764	6,217,153	6,416,167

6,243,113	6,283,581	6,247,790	6,260,953	6,267,469
6,273,544	6,309,048	6,420,196	6,443,558	6,439,689
6,378,989	09/425,420	09/422,893	09/693,703	6,406,129
6,505,916	6,457,809	6,550,895	6,457,812	6,428,133

The above patents and patent applications are hereby incorporated by reference.

These ink jet technologies are suitable for the construction of miniature, low cost pagewidth printers, which can readily fit within a keyboard form factor.

Summary of the Invention

According to a first aspect of the invention, there is provided a keyboard for use with a computer, the keyboard comprising

a housing that defines an input formation for the input of sheets of media;

a keypad carried by the housing;

a pagewidth printer arranged in the housing; and

a feed mechanism positioned in the housing for feeding the sheets of media from the input formation through the housing along a print media feed path so that the printer can carry out a printing operation on the sheets of media, wherein the feed mechanism includes a moving feed member that defines a substantially planar support surface along the media feed path.

The moving feed member may be in the form of an endless belt and the feed mechanism may include a roller assembly for driving the belt.

The roller assembly may include a drive roller and an opposed idler roller.

A planar support member may be positioned in the housing to bear against the belt, such that a portion of the belt abutting the planar support member is maintained in a substantially planar condition.

The input formation may be in the form of a slot defined in the housing.

The keypad may be an alphanumeric keypad with generally rectangular dimensions, the input slot being defined on one of a pair of longer sides of the keypad and an exit slot being defined on the other longer side of the keypad, with the feed mechanism being positioned between the slots such that the media feed path between the slots is substantially planar.

The invention extends to a computer which includes a keyboard as described above.

The advantage of the invention is that the planarity of the print media as it moves through the housing allows a smooth media transfer. Further, forms of print media other than paper can be used. The planarity of the print media facilitates a stable operational platform for the pagewidth printer, since shaking of the keyboard is minimized.

According to a second aspect of the invention, there is provided a keyboard, particularly for use with a computer, the keyboard including

- a housing;

- an alphanumeric keypad carried by the housing; and

- a page width printer arranged in the housing.

The housing has dimensions approximating those of a standard computer keyboard, the housing having an ejection slot along one, longer side through which print media can be ejected after an image has been printed on the print media by the printer.

Preferably, the housing includes an input slot along an opposed, longer side for feeding print media to the printer. Typically, the print media is in the form of sheets of paper to be fed to the printer one sheet at a time.

The keyboard may include a feed means arranged in the housing for feeding the print media from the input slot to the printer. The feed means may be arranged within the housing and may be in the form of a belt drive arrangement for feeding the print media to the printer.

Further, the keyboard may include an engaging means arranged intermediate the printer and the ejection slot for feeding the print media out of the ejection slot. Thus, the engaging means may be arranged downstream of the printer and may be in the form of one or more spiked wheels which grip and transport the print media to the ejection slot.

As indicated above, the keyboard is particularly intended for use with a computer. Accordingly, the keypad may include a standard, QWERTY keypad, a numeral keypad and a plurality of control keys.

The housing may include an access opening for enabling an ink supply of the printer to be replenished. A lid in a top surface of the housing may close off the access opening. The ink supply of the printer may include a removable ink cartridge which is accessed through the access opening of the housing.

Preferably, the printer is a full color printer. The printer may be a photo quality printer.

The printhead may comprise an array of nozzles, said array being fabricated by microelectromechanical (MEMS) techniques.

According to a second aspect of the invention, there is provided a computer keyboard which includes

- a housing having an array of keys carried thereon and defining a chamber;
- a pagewidth ink jet printer arranged within the chamber of the housing; and
- an input slot in one side of the housing for feeding print media to the printer and an ejection slot in an opposed side of the housing through which the print media is ejected after printing.

Brief Description of the Drawings

The invention is now described by way of example with reference to the accompanying diagrammatic drawings in which:

Figure 1 shows a three dimensional view of a keyboard, in accordance with the invention;

Figure 2 shows a sectional side view of the keyboard; and

Figure 3 shows, on an enlarged scale, a sectional side view of part of the keyboard.

Detailed Description of the Drawings

In the drawings, reference numeral 10 generally designates a keyboard in accordance with the invention. The keyboard 10 is intended particularly for use with a computer. The keyboard 10 comprises a housing 12 on which a keypad 14 is arranged. A printer 16 (Figures 2 and 3) is contained in a chamber 18 defined in the housing 12 of the keyboard 10.

The housing 12 is dimensioned similarly to a conventional computer keyboard and is substantially rectangular when viewed in plan having a pair of opposed, longer sides and a pair of opposed, shorter sides. An input slot 22 is defined in one of the longer sides of the housing 12 for feeding print media in the form of a sheet of paper 24 to the printer 16. Preferably, the input slot 22 is defined in that side of the housing 12 which, in use, is closer to a user of the keyboard 10.

An ejection slot 26 is defined in an opposed, longer side of the housing through which the sheet of print media, incorporating an image 28, is ejected after completion of

printing. An exit tray 30 extends outwardly from the ejection slot 26 on to which the sheet of paper 24 is fed after printing.

The keypad 14 includes an array of keys 38 arranged in a QWERTY keypad 32, a numerals keypad 34 and a plurality of control keys 36. Each key 38 of the keypad 14 includes a key cap 40 which communicates with a keyboard circuit board 42 (Figures 2 and 3) through an opening in a top surface of the housing 12. The key caps 40 engage key switches 44 mounted on the circuit board 42.

The printer 16 comprises a page width ink jet printhead 46 mounted in a support 48. The printhead 46 is a multi-color printhead for printing photo quality images 28. Accordingly, the support 48 includes a plurality of galleries 50, each of which contains a different color ink to be fed via passages 52 to the printhead 46.

The printer 16 includes a controller printed circuit board (PCB) 55. The PCB 55 receives printing commands from the computer (not shown) via a USB connector 56 (Figure 1). A printhead PCB 54 communicates with the printhead 46 via a TAB automated bond film 58 or any other suitable, flexible film. The controller PCB 55 connects to the printhead PCB 54 via a flexible film.

A retaining device, in the form of a locking member 60, releasably locks the printer 16 in position in the chamber 18 of the housing 12. The locking device 60 includes a cam-like locking member 62.

Further, the printer 16 includes an ink supply cartridge (not shown) for feeding ink to the galleries 50 of the printhead support 48. The ink supply cartridge is accessed through an opening, closed off by a lid 64 (Figure 1), in a top surface of the housing 12 to replace the cartridge when its supply of ink has been depleted.

The keyboard 10 includes a feed mechanism 66 for feeding the sheet of paper 24 to the printer 16. The feed mechanism 66 comprises an endless belt 68 which is rotated by a drive roller 70 and extends about an opposed, idler roller 72. A planar member in the form of a sprung metal plate 74 bears against the belt 68 to maintain the planarity of the belt 68 and, accordingly, the sheet of paper 24.

An engaging means, in the form of at least one spiked wheel 76, is arranged intermediate the printer 16 and the ejection slot 26. The, or each, spiked wheel 76 engages the sheet of paper 24, after printing of the image 28, and feeds the sheet of paper 24 through the ejection slot 26 to be accessed by the user.

In use, when an image 28 is to be printed, the user inserts a sheet of paper into the keyboard through the input slot 22 where it is fed to the printer 16 by the feed arrangement 66. By means of an appropriate command via the computer, the information or image to be printed is fed to the printer 16 via the USB connector 56 and the controller PCB 55. The printer 16 is controlled by the PCB 55 to print the image 28 on the sheet of paper 24 and to cause ejection of the sheet of paper 24 together with its printed image 28 thereon through the ejection slot 26.

It is an advantage of the invention that a computer peripheral is provided which enables a person rapidly to obtain copies of images while seated before the person's computer. In this regard, it is to be noted that the printer 16 is a high-speed printer which can print at rates of up to 30 pages per minute. Hence, the need for using a communal workstation is obviated. In addition, the incorporation of the printer within the keyboard 10 considerably reduces the space required for a computer together with its peripherals and, in so doing, providing more space to a user. It will be appreciated that this can be of major benefit where the workstation is a confined working space.